

mention of a resurrection of dead people, some began to scoff; while others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject’” (Acts 17:32, CJB/CJSB). Paul did find some who heard him who believed in the good news of Yeshua (Acts 17:34), but on the whole he did not find too many that interested.

Acts 20:17-28

“The Assembly Purchased With God’s Own Blood”

“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the [assembly]. And when they had come to him, he said to them, ‘You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Yeshua, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the [assembly] of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Within discussions about the nature of Yeshua, the attention of the debate can tend to focus around only a few passages, such as the Johannine prologue (John 1:1-18), the *Carmen Christi* hymn (Philippians 2:5-11), and statements such as those of 1 Timothy 2:5. While no Bible reader should deny that material such as the Gospel of John, and many statements in the Pauline letters, among others, have a conscious intention to address the nature of Yeshua—it is in those places where there is, perhaps, a not-so-conscious intention to address the nature of Yeshua, where we should be considering whether the First Century *ekklēsia* considered Yeshua to simply be a supernatural but ultimately created agent of God, or indeed uncreated and integrated into the Divine Identity.

In his encounter with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-28, readers mainly encounter Luke’s record of Paul departing to Judea, and our attention is mainly directed at the concern present if Paul goes to Jerusalem. Paul reviews some of his ministry activities, noting how he had been “serving the Lord with much humility and with tears, in spite of the tests I had to undergo because of the plots of the unbelieving Jews” (Acts 20:19, CJB/CJSB). Paul describes how he had been consistent in his work, stating, “I did not shrink back from proclaiming to you anything that was profitable, teaching you publicly as well as from house to house, testifying to both Jewish and Greek people repentance to God and trust in our Lord Yeshua” (Acts 20:20-21, TLV). Textually speaking, the reference in Acts 20:19 to “serving the Lord” (*douleuōn tō Kuriō*, δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ) could be a reference to either God the Father or Yeshua the Son, but more likely the former. Following this, however, Paul says that his ministry was directed to Jews and Greeks, focused on *eis Theon metanoian kai pistin eis ton Kurion hēmōn Iēsoun* (εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν), “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Acts 20:21, PME). Here, questions can actually be raised as to why the titles “God” and “Lord” are employed side by side, the latter employed to refer to Yeshua the

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Messiah, when it would not be out of place for Paul to have only spoken in terms “of repentance toward God and faith in Yeshua the Messiah.”

With God the Father and Yeshua the Messiah obviously working together in the salvation process of people (Acts 20:21), Paul continues, noticeably describing his own faith experience as something that involves the place of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit or *Ruach HaKodesh*, and God the Father:

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Yerushalayim. I don't know what will happen to me there, other than that in every city the *Ruach HaKodesh* keeps warning me that imprisonment and persecution await me. But I consider my own life of no importance to me whatsoever, as long as I can finish the course ahead of me, the task I received from the Lord Yeshua—to declare in depth the Good News of God's love and kindness” (Acts 20:22-24, CJB/CJSB).

If one were going to legitimately conclude that there is a plural Godhead composed of, at a minimum, the co-existent manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—seeing the Apostle Paul describe his ministry experience the way he does in Acts 20:22-23, organically involving the activity of the Spirit, Son, and Father, would be a significant place to consider. Paul follows this up with the statement, “But I consider my own life of no importance to me whatsoever, as long as I can finish the course ahead of me, the task I received from the Lord Yeshua—to declare in depth the Good News of God's love and kindness” (Acts 20:24, CJB/CJSB). While the second entity noted in Acts 20:24, *Theos* (θεός), obviously references God the Father, once again questions can be raised as to why the Son is referred to as *Kuriou Iēsou* (κυρίου Ἰησοῦ) or Lord Yeshua, when Yeshua or Iēsous by itself would seemingly be sufficient. This bears witness, how in normal speech, a figure like Paul saw a definite overlap not just in the activity of the Father and the Son, but the Son being integrated into the same Divine Identity as the Father.

Paul reports to the Ephesian elders how his ministry service has reached a point of significant transition, and how not everyone among them would see him in person again (Acts 20:25-27). In issuing a warning to them, about things that they might encounter in the future, Paul makes an important claim which can certainly influence how Bible readers approach the nature of Yeshua. Acts 20:28 states, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly of God which He purchased with His own blood” (PME). How is one to render *tēn ekklēsiān tou Theou, hēn periepoiēsato dia tou haimatos tou idiou* (τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ιδίου)? The Brown and Comfort interlinear has, “the church – of God, which he purchased with – blood – his own.”²⁷³ Many versions, notably including the RSV/NRSV have the slight extrapolation, “with the blood of his own Son,” for *dia tou haimatos tou idiou*, even though *huios* (υἱός) or “S/son” is missing from the text. And, there are Acts commentators, holding to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, who would concur with this conclusion, and indicate that the Sonship of Yeshua is what is in view.²⁷⁴

Alternatively, with God clearly as the subject of Acts 20:28, *dia tou haimatos tou idiou* or “with his own blood” (ESV), would be a reference to God purchasing the *ekklēsia* with God's own blood. This inevitably leads one to recognize that Paul is referencing God's purchase of the *ekklēsia* “with His own blood,” obviously the blood of Yeshua the Messiah shed at Golgotha,²⁷⁵ and thus that this Yeshua must be God. The Goodspeed New Testament offers the slight paraphrase of Acts 20:28b, “be shepherds of the church of God, which he got at the cost of his

²⁷³ Ibid., 495.

²⁷⁴ Bruce, *Acts*, 416; Marshall, *Acts*, 334; Bock, 630; Peterson, 570; Schnabel, pp 846-847.

²⁷⁵ Fernando, 534.

own life.” The significance of Acts 20:28 and of the assembly being purchased “with His own blood,” meaning God’s blood in the Incarnated Yeshua—while a difficult statement for many, does provide testimony to Yeshua being integrated into the Divine Identity.